

The Revolution of 1800 and the Principles of Ninety-Eight

I

Thomas Jefferson wrote proudly of "the revolution of 1800," calling it "as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 1776 was in its form." Many of his followers agreed. Today, however, most historians would probably prefer a different phrase. Too little changed—and that too slowly—to justify the connotations present in that loaded word. There were no radicals among the great triumvirate who guided the Republicans in power, as they had led them through the years of opposition. The President was bent on reconciliation with the body of his former foes. "We are all Republicans, all Federalists," he said. He wanted to detach the mass of Federalists from their former leaders, and he knew that this was incompatible with an abrupt reversal of the policies that had been followed for a dozen years. He had, in any case, no notion that his predecessors' work could be dismantled all at once. The Hamiltonian system might be hateful, but it had bound the nation to a contract it had no alternative except to honor. Madison and Gallatin, who were by instinct more conservative than Jefferson himself, were not disposed to disagree.

From the beginning of the new administration, nonetheless, Republicans insisted that a change of policies, not just of men, was necessary to return the state to its republican foundations. In his inaugural address, Jefferson announced commitment to "a wise and frugal government which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the

Reprinted from Lance Banning, The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology. Copyright © 1978 by Cornell University. Used by permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

mouth of labor the bread it has earned." This kind of government, he hinted, would be guided by a set of principles that could be readily distinguished from the policies of years before. Among them were

Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations; entangling alliances with none.

The support of the state governments in all their rights as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies.

A well disciplined militia, our best reliance in peace and for the first moments of war, till regulars may relieve them.

Economy in public expense, that labor may be lightly burdened

The honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith.

Reform began while Jefferson awaited the assembly of the first Republican Congress. Pardons were issued to the few men still affected by sedition prosecutions. The diplomatic corps, a target for its costs and for the influence it was thought to give to the executive, was cut to barest bones. A few of the most active Federalists were purged from office, while the President withheld commissions signed by Adams after his defeat was known. The evolution of a partisan appointments policy was too slow for some members of the party, who argued that "no enemy to democratic government will be provided with the means to sap and destroy any of its principles nor to profit by a government to which they are hostile in theory and practice." But even the most radical were satisfied with the administration's purpose when the President announced his program to the Seventh Congress.

Jefferson's first annual message was "an epitome of republican principles applied to practical purposes." After a review of foreign policy and Indian affairs, the President suggested abolition of all internal taxes. "The remaining sources of revenue will be sufficient," he believed, "to provide for the support of government, to pay the interest on the public debts, and to discharge the principals in shorter periods than the laws or the general expectations had contemplated. . . . Sound principles will not justify our taxing the industry of our fellow citizens to accumulate treasure for wars to happen we know not when, and which might not perhaps happen but from the temptations offered by that treasure." Burdens, he admitted, could only be reduced if expenditures fell too. But there was room to wonder "whether offices or officers have not been multiplied unnecessarily." The military, for example, was larger than required to garrison the posts, and there was no use for the surplus. "For defence against invasion, their number is as nothing; nor is it conceived needful or safe that a standing army should be kept up in time of peace." The judiciary system, packed and altered by the Federalists at the close of their regime, would naturally "present itself to the contemplation of Congress." And the laws concerning naturalization might again be liberalized.

The Seventh Congress, voting usually on party lines, did everything that Jefferson had recommended. It also gave approval to a plan prepared by Gallatin

tin, the Secretary of the Treasury, for the complete retirement of the public debt before the end of 1817. Along with its repeal of the Judiciary Act of 1800, it reduced the army to three thousand officers and men, while lowering appropriations for the navy in the face of war with Tripoli. Of all its measures, though, the abolition of internal taxes (and four hundred revenue positions) called forth the most eloquent enunciation of the principles on which the new majority thought it should act:

The Constitution is as dear to us as to our adversaries. . . . It is by repairing the breeches that we mean to save it and to set it on a firm and lasting foundation. . . . We are yet a young nation and must learn wisdom from the experience of others. By avoiding the course which other nations have steered, we shall likewise avoid their catastrophe. Public debts, standing armies, and heavy taxes have converted the English nation into a mere machine to be used at the pleasure of the crown. . . . We have had no riot act, but we have had a Sedition Act calculated to secure the executive from free and full investigation; we have had an army and still have a small one, securing to the executive an immensity of patronage; and we have a large national debt, for the payment . . . of which it is necessary to collect "yearly millions" by means of a cloud of officers spread over the face of the country. . . . Iniquitous as we deem the manner of its settlement, we mean to discharge; but we mean not to perpetuate it; it is no part of our political creed that "a public debt is a public blessing."

Before the session ended, Jefferson could tell a friend that "some things may perhaps be left undone from motives of compromise for a time and not to alarm by too sudden a reformation," but the proceedings of the Congress gave every ground for hope that "we shall be able by degrees to introduce sound principles and make them habitual." Indeed, the session was so good a start that there was little left to recommend in 1802. The effort of the next few years would be to keep the course already set.

"Revolution" may not be the proper word to characterize the changes introduced in 1801 and early 1802. "Apostasy," however, would be worse. Yet every study of the Jeffersonian ascendancy must come to terms with the magnificent and multivolumed work of Henry Adams. Though now almost a century old, the scope and literary power of this classic give it influence that has lasted to the present day. And one of Adams' major themes was the abnegation put an end to parties by detaching the great body of Federalists from their irreconcilable leaders. By 1804 he seemed to have approached this end. To Adams, though, his great successes were a consequence of Jefferson's abandonment of principle and single-minded quest for popularity. If party lines were melting, it had been the Jeffersonians who had compromised their principles the most:

not a Federalist measure, not even the Alien and Sedition laws, had been expressly repudiated; . . . the national debt was larger than it had ever been before, the

navy maintained and energetically employed, the national bank preserved and its operations extended; . . . the powers of the national government had been increased [in the Louisiana Purchase] to a point that made blank paper of the Constitution.

It was the Federalists, not the Republicans, who now upheld the states' rights principles of 1798.

Every part of Adams' powerful indictment could be contradicted or excused. Thus, Jefferson abandoned scruple in the case of the Louisiana Purchase with reluctance and because there seemed some danger that the Emperor of France might change his mind about a bargain that could guarantee the nation's peace while promising indefinite postponement of the day when overcrowding and development might put an end to its capacity for freedom. Jefferson continued to distrust the national bank, but would not break the public's pledge by moving to revoke its charter. The party had repudiated the Sedition Law, explicitly refusing to renew it in the session that had also seen a relaxation of the naturalization law. The national debt had been considerably reduced before the purchase of Louisiana raised it once again, and it would fall much further in the years to come.

It is necessary to admit, however, that the list of Adams' charges also could be lengthened. While Jefferson himself was never reconciled, Gallatin and Madison eventually supported the Bank of the United States. While Jefferson preferred to lead by indirection, he was in fact a stronger President than either of his predecessors ever tried to be. His public messages suggested measures, but his hints were often taken as commands by party members in the Congress. Informally or through floor leaders in the House, the administration made its wishes known and drafted most of the important legislation. Finally, in 1808, in its progressively more stringent efforts to enforce the embargo, Jefferson's administration wielded powers over the daily life of Americans that far exceeded anything its predecessors ever sought, even using regulations to help enforce the law.

There were, without a doubt, occasions after 1801 when the warring parties came so close to switching sides that one might doubt that principle meant much to either group. The Federalists stood forth, when they could hope to profit, as defenders of states' rights. They shamelessly employed old opposition rhetoric to criticize the massive force of party loyalty and the influence of the President on Congress. Nor was Henry Adams first to charge the Jeffersonians with a surrender to the principles of their opponents. Jefferson and his successor faced a swelling discontent from a minority of purists among Republicans themselves.

In October, 1801, before the meeting of the Seventh Congress, Edmund Pendleton had published a widely read consideration of the policies that would be necessary to make the revolution of 1800 complete. Jefferson's election, he began, had "arrested a train of measures which were gradually conducting us towards ruin." But the election victory did not permit Republicans to rest

content. It merely opened up an opportunity "to erect new barriers against folly, fraud, and ambition and to explain such parts of the Constitution as have been already or may be interpreted contrary to the intention of those who adopted it." Liberty, said Pendleton, is the "chief good" of government, but "if government is so constructed as to enable its administration to assail that liberty with the several weapons heretofore most fatal to it, the structure is defective: of this sort, standing armies—fleets—severe penal laws—war—and a multitude of civil officers are universally admitted to be." Union is a great good, but union can "only be preserved by confining . . . the federal government to the exercise of powers clearly required by the general interest . . . because the states exhibit such varieties of character and interests that a consolidated general government would . . . produce civil war and dissension." A separation of powers is necessary, but the Constitution gives the Senate a part in the exercise of powers that belong to other branches "and tends to create in that body a dangerous aristocracy." Representative government must rest on the will of the people, but the people's will can "never be expressed if their representatives are corrupted or influenced by hopes of office." "Since experience has evinced that much mischief may be done under an unwise administration," it is time to consider several amendments to the Constitution. These should make the President ineligible for a second term and give the appointment of judges and ambassadors to Congress; end the Senate's role in executive functions and shorten the Senators' terms of office; make judges and legislators incapable of accepting any federal office; subject the judges to removal by the legislature; form "some check upon the abuse of public credit"; declare that treaties relating to war or peace or requiring the expenditure of money must be ratified by the whole Congress; and define the powers of the federal government in such a way as to "defy the wiles of construction."

"The Danger Not Over" was a systematic effort to define the fundamental changes that seemed to be implicit in the principles of 1798. And as the years went by without a movement to secure the constitutional amendments it had recommended, without destruction of the national bank, without complete proscription of old Federalists from places of public trust, "there were a number of people who soon thought and said to one another that Mr. Jefferson did many good things, but neglected some better things," who came to "view his policy as very like a compromise with Mr. Hamilton's, . . . a compromise between monarchy and democracy." Strongest in Virginia and including several of the most important party writers of the 1790s—George Logan and John Taylor as well as Pendleton himself—this band of "Old Republicans" soon found an eloquent, if vitriolic and eccentric, spokesman in the Congress. In 1806, John Randolph, who had led the party's forces in the Seventh Congress, broke with the administration and commenced a systematic opposition to the moral bankruptcy and "backstairs influence" of the government. As Jefferson and Madison began to face the gravest crisis of their leadership, they were persistently annoyed by a minority of vocal critics from within

their former ranks. In 1808, Monroe became the unsuccessful candidate for those expressing this variety of discontent.

* * *

Both [Henry] Adams and the Old Republicans identified the principles of '98 with the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of that year. To both, the party's creed in years of opposition centered on allegiance to states' rights. But I have tried to show that such an understanding is too narrow. Even in the crisis introduced by the repressive laws, states' rights and strict construction of the Constitution were among the means to more essential ends. The means were taken seriously, indeed, but they were never held among the absolutes. The body of the party and its most important leaders never sought, as their essential end, to hold the federal government within the narrowest of bounds. They sought, instead, a federal government that would preserve the virtues necessary to a special way of life. Their most important goal had been to check a set of policies—among them loose interpretation of the Constitution—that Republicans had seen as fundamentally destructive of the kind of government and social habits without which liberty could not survive. To judge them only on the basis of their loyalty to strict construction and states' rights is to apply a standard they had never held.

Minds changed when party leaders were confronted with responsibility. But they did not change thoroughly enough to justify the charge that they adopted principles of their opponents. The principles of the Republicans had not been Antifederalist. Republicans had traced the evils of the 1790s to the motives of the governors, not to the government itself. With few and brief exceptions, most had thought a change of policy, without a change of structure, would effect a cure. Moreover, in the last years of the decade, the development of party thought had probably persuaded many members to believe that a simple change of men might cure more evils than they once had thought.

The Republican persuasion rose, in the beginning, under circumstances that conjoined to make a reconstruction of an ideology developed in a different time and place seem relevant for the United States. The revolutionary debt to eighteenth-century opposition thought was certainly sufficient, by itself, to have assured loud echoes of the old ideas in the first years of the new republic. But this is not the lesson of this work. Republican convictions were not simply reminiscent of the old ideas. Republicans revived the eighteenth-century ideology as a coherent structure, reconstructed it so thoroughly that the persistence of an English style of argument is easily as striking as the changes we might trace to revolutionary alterations of the American polity. At least three circumstances of the 1790s had to join with expectations prompted by the heritage of revolutionary thought to generate a reconstruction so complete. None of these circumstances persisted to the decade's end. First, popular respect for Washington and ambiguity about the nature of the new executive directed

discontent at the first minister. Second, Hamiltonian finance was modeled on an English prototype. And finally, an opposition first appeared in the House of Representatives.

The Republican persuasion, in its early years, attempted to alert the nation to a ministerial conspiracy that was operating through corruption to secure the revival of a British kind of constitution. Ministerial influence would subvert the independence of the Congress, which would acquiesce in constitutional constructions leading to consolidation of the states and thence to monarchy. Meanwhile, a decay of public virtue, spread by the example of the lackers of administration and encouraged by the shift of wealth resulting from the funding plan, would ease the way for a transition to hereditary forms. With relatively minor changes, this was just the accusation that the eighteenth-century English opposition had traditionally directed at governments in power, and, like its prototype, it was, in the beginning, the weapon of a legislative group that had to reconcile its status as minority with its commitment to majority control. Legislative blocs were fluid, and the minority could understand its own position and appeal for popular support with the assistance of traditional assumptions that the influence of the Treasury, when added to an honest difference of opinion, was sufficient to account for policies with which they disagreed.

Images of conspiracy and accusations of corruption continued to provide the starting point for Republican analyses of Federalist policies, but it was not so many years before events and circumstances pushed Republican opinion away from its original foundations. First, circumstances undermined a logical necessity of neo-opposition arguments by making the Republicans a majority in the House. Then, Hamilton resigned. Concurrently, however, Jay's Treaty and the foreign war became the major issues for dispute. In other words, just when the opposition might have savored the retirement of the archconspirator, to redirect attention to the powers of the Senate and the actions of the President himself. British influence and affection for the cause of monarchy displaced attachment to the funding system as the leading explanation for administration policies. But the Republicans could see that the financial structure was dependent on the British trade, and thus the Federalists' foreign policy appeared to be a new means to old ends. In this way, the Republicans continued their conspiratorial analysis into the Adams years.

Only in the last years of the decade can we see a clearer movement of Republican concerns away from the inherited foundations of their thought and toward a style of argument that seems more native. The alteration might be traced to 1794, when the Republicans began to count on a majority of Representatives. From that point forward, we have seen, party writers focused somewhat less on the corruption of the lower house and somewhat more on dangers posed by enemies of the Republic in the several branches of the government and in the country as a whole. During the first years under Adams, critics concentrated their denunciations less on the "funding and banking gentry" or the

Hamiltonian "phalanx" than on the "anglo-federal," "anglo-monarchical," or simply "tory" party. The crisis of 1798—the popular hysteria, the Quasi-War, and the Sedition Law—strengthened this trend. Such a crisis in a polity that rested on a large electorate made the administration's influence on the legislature seem less important than the efforts of a ruling party to mislead the people and destroy effective checks on Federalist abuses. Finally, the split among the Federalists confirmed the inclination to direct attacks, not at the link between the government and its dependents in the Congress—the characteristic target of the British critics of administration—but at a party that depended on its influence with the voters. During the last two years of the decade, Republican newspapers gave less space to criticism of the Congress or administration than they did to mockery of their Federalist competitors or efforts to assassinate the reputations of the leaders of the other party. The scurrility of party sheets reflected their recognition that the enemy, in the United States, was not a governmental faction of the British type, but a party with its base among the people.

When Jefferson assumed the presidential office, he and the body of his party were prepared to believe that they had awakened a majority of voters and thereby put an end to the most immediate danger to the American Republic. Removal of the enemy from power and from public trust had come to seem sufficient, by itself, to safeguard liberty while friends of freedom worked toward gradual replacement of the Hamiltonian system with one better suited to republican ways. With the conspirators deposed, the country could afford to ease toward change—and change would come more certainly that way. Still, change it must—change as rapidly as possible according to a very different vision of the good society. Republicans were still persuaded that the debt must be retired as rapidly as preexisting contracts would permit, without internal taxes. It should not be clung to for its broader economic uses. It would not be used as an excuse to push the federal government into revenue resources better left to separate states. Even here, fanaticism was eschewed by a majority. Jefferson's administration did not hesitate to borrow more for the Louisiana Purchase. But the Republicans were willing to subordinate almost all else to the reduction of the debt. Every year the debt existed meant, to them, another year that taxes would inflate the rich, another year of the increasing gap between the rich and poor, which was potentially destructive to free states. By 1812, Republican administrations had reduced the debt from \$83 million, where it had climbed under the Federalists, to \$27.5 million. They would have retired it completely in a few more years if war had not gotten in the way.

Reform did not go far enough to satisfy the Old Republicans. Change was incomplete enough—and leaders compromised enough—to make it possible for Henry Adams to support his accusation that the Jeffersonians surrendered to the principles of their opponents. Yet even Adams tried to have it several ways. Sometimes he condemned the Jeffersonians for lack of principle. Sometimes he accused them of a change of mind. At other times, however, he switched ground to level his attacks on their adherence to a set of

principles that were ill-suited to the country's needs. The effort to retire the debt, he pointed out, committed the first \$7.3 million of yearly revenues to payment of principal and interest. The remainder was too small to run the government and meet the costs of national defense. "The army was not large enough to hold the Indians in awe; the navy was not strong enough to watch the coasts. . . . The country was at the mercy of any Power which might choose to rob it." "Gallatin's economies turned on the question whether the national debt or the risk of foreign aggression were most dangerous to America." The Republicans assumed the former.

If we would choose among the different condemnations Adams made of the Republican regime, it would be better to prefer the last. Adherence to the principles of ninety-eight—a strikingly consistent effort to adopt and maintain policies implicit in the ideology of opposition days—is a better explanation for Republican actions during their years in power than any emphasis upon hypocrisy or change. The Old Republicans were worrisome beyond their numbers for no other reason than that they appealed to principles that still had the allegiance of large portions of the party. And, as Adams saw it, it was the party's loyalty to old ideas that brought the country to the edge of ruin in 1812.

II

The first years of the new republic were a time of unexampled prosperity and growth. The most important reason was the European war, which continued with few interruptions from 1790 to 1815. With France and Britain both preoccupied with warfare, a portion of the trade that they would normally have carried fell by default to neutrals. As the greatest trading neutral of the age, America had much to gain. It also risked involvement in the war, since both the European powers periodically attempted to deny the other neutral help.

During the 1790s, America's attempt to carry on a thriving commerce had nearly brought a war with Britain. The effort in fact resulted in a limited conflict with France. Thomas Jefferson came to the Presidency near the beginning of a brief respite in the European struggle, and the interlude of peace gave the Republicans a chance to apply their principles of governmental economy. In 1803, however, France and Britain resumed their titanic war. With Napoleon in power, Republicans had long since dropped their admiration of the French. But the commercial problems of the 1790s now returned with doubled force. After 1805, when Admiral Lord Nelson destroyed most of the French fleet in the Battle of Trafalgar, Britain was unchallengeable at sea, while Bonaparte was temporarily supreme on land. Both powers turned to economic warfare, catching the United States between.

For America the situation reached its worst in 1807. In that year Napoleon's Milan Decree completed a "continental system" under which the Emperor threatened to seize any neutral ship that had submitted to a British search or paid a duty in a British port. Britain replied with Orders-in-Council that promised to seize any neutral trading with the continent unless that ship

had paid a British fee. The combined effect of French and British measures was to threaten any vessel engaged in the continental trade. To make the situation worse, in the summer of 1807, near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay, the British frigate "Leopard" fired upon the American warship "Chesapeake," forced it to submit to search, and impressed four sailors into British service. By any standard, "Leopard's" action was a cause for war.

War might have been an easy choice. There was a storm of patriotic outrage possibly a match for that following the revelation of the XYZ Affair ten years before. Particularly in the Old Northwest, where British officials in Canada soon began to give assistance and encouragement to Tecumseh and his efforts to unite the western tribes against the progress of new settlement, demands for war rose steadily from that point on. But the Republicans did not want war. They were determined to face the present troubles in the way that they believed the Federalists should have responded to similar problems in the 1790s.

Since the beginning of the party quarrel, Republicans had consistently expressed a fear of war and a profound distrust of normal preparations for defense. They were afraid of war's effects on civil liberties. They clung to the traditional distrust of standing armies. They had consistently opposed the frightful cost of navies. Their ideology identified high taxes, large armed forces, and the increase in executive authority that seemed inseparable from war as mortal dangers to republican society and government. Even preparations for hostilities would require abandonment of all the most important policies that they had followed since the triumph seven years before: low taxes, small armed forces, little governmental guidance of the nation's life, and quick retirement of the public debt.

In any case, Republicans had always argued that America possessed a weapon that provided an alternative to war, a weapon that had proven its effectiveness during the long struggle preceding independence. This weapon was its trade. Since opposition days, the party's leaders had maintained that the things America exported—mostly food and other raw materials—were necessities of life. The things America imported, on the other hand, were mostly manufactured goods and other "luxuries." In case of trouble, then, America could refuse to trade. Healthier than Europe, because it was not bound to large-scale manufacturing, America would win a test of wills, creating potent discontent and dislocation in the feeble state. Trade restrictions could secure the national interest as effectively as war and without the dangers to free government and social health that war would necessarily incur. Trade was the weapon that the Madisonians had wanted to employ against the British back in 1794. It was the weapon that Republicans preferred when difficulties once again arose. Indeed, the party held to economic warfare, to its antiwar and anti-preparation ideology, so long and so stubbornly that the result was nearly a disaster for the United States.

In December, 1807, Jefferson's administration responded to the French and British decrees by placing an embargo on American trade. The embargo

had a measurable effect in France and Britain. Unfortunately the economic consequences for America were even worse. Under the embargo, all American sailings overseas were halted for more than a year. The country suffered a severe depression. In New England and upstate New York, noncooperation and illegal sailings rose to such proportions that the government resorted to repressive measures so severe as to endanger the Republicans' reputation as friends of limited government and guardians of civil rights. To keep the peace within the country and to safeguard their majority, the Republicans relaxed their application of the economic weapon. As Madison succeeded Jefferson, Congress started a long search for ways to hurt the Europeans more than the United States. On the surface, this looked very like a gradual retreat. Inconsistent enforcement of changing regulations meant that pressure was repeatedly relaxed just as it began to have effect, and the Republicans' persistence simply led the warring powers to conclude that America would never fight. In 1809 the embargo was replaced with a measure confining nonintercourse to trade between America and French or British ports. In 1810 restrictions were removed completely, although it was provided that nonintercourse would be resumed against one country or the other if either of the powers would agree to end its violations of neutral rights.

Since the ending of American restrictions would benefit Great Britain, Napoleon made moves that it was possible to interpret as an exemption of American shipping from the Berlin and Milan Decrees. Madison announced that nonintercourse would be imposed against the British unless the Orders-in-Council were repealed. When they were not, restrictions were resumed.

The situation quickly passed the bounds of the absurd. By the winter of 1811-1812, four years of various experiments with commercial coercion had failed to force a change in European policies. During all that time the frontier trouble had continued, and Great Britain had persisted in its arrogant, humiliating practice of impressment. Meanwhile the Republicans had lost New England and were threatened in the middle states by the revival of a party that they still considered dangerous to the survival of a democratic way. With the people growing restless under policies that damaged their prosperity without securing change, it was increasingly apparent to most members of the party that commercial weapons would not work. The choice must be between submission to the British policies and war. Neither the people's sense of national honor nor the survival of the Republican Party—a party that believed that liberty would not be safe with its opponents—would permit submission. Madison reluctantly resigned himself to war, and younger representatives from the West and South—"war hawks"—to their enemies—worked a declaration through the Congress. There were defections by Clintonians and Quids, but it was basically a party vote.

III

To anyone inclined to balance gain with loss, the War of 1812 must seem a masterpiece of folly. The god who ruled its fortunes was decidedly perverse.

Two days before the Senate completed a declaration of war, though not in time for news to cross the sea, the British government announced that the Orders-in-Council would be repealed. The battle at New Orleans was planned by generals who had not learned that peace had been agreed upon at Ghent on December 24, 1814, two weeks before. The slaughter on the Mississippi—nineteen months of warfare—ultimately went for naught. The Treaty of Ghent simply restored the situation that had existed before the war. Boundaries were unaltered. Disputes over neutral rights and impressment were left unresolved.

Contemporaries, however, were not disposed to make a practical calculation of this sort. After all, the war had not been fought for rational reasons alone. National honor, the reputation of republican government, and the continuing supremacy of the Republican party had seemed to be at stake.

National honor had been satisfied. Jackson's stunning victory at New Orleans more than redeemed earlier reverses in the field. And news of his triumph arrived in the East just before the news of peace. Americans celebrated the end of the struggle with a brilliant burst of national pride. They felt that they had fought a second war for independence, and had won. If little had been gained, nothing had been lost in a contest with the greatest imperial power on the earth.

Independence, of course, had never been literally at risk. For Britain the War of 1812 was an unwelcome outcome of a quarrel that had seemed a lesser evil than a relaxation of the struggle against Napoleon. Once Bonaparte was vanquished, little could be gained by further prosecution of the lesser war. British statesmen had no will whatever for the effort that would have been required to defeat, much less to subjugate, the United States. They preferred a quick renewal of the valuable American trade.

Nevertheless, a new American independence did follow the Treaty of Ghent. The American Revolution was, at least in one respect, an effort to break connections with a corrupt Old World. But withdrawal from European involvements had been far from complete. Americans could not be indifferent when the republican revolution promised to convert Europe in the years after 1789, and the new American republic had continued an oceanic trade that inevitably weighed in the power calculations of European states. Independence from European involvements could not be more complete until the new nation had proven its ability to survive the great wars of the French Revolution. The magnetic attraction of European developments would not be weakened until the United States stood once again as the preeminent republic in the world, its belief in European corruption once again confirmed.

* * *

In the first years of the new federal government, Alexander Hamilton had grounded his great plans on the assumption that the world was not the kind of place where republican purists could pursue their schemes in peace. Republicans had insisted that there was an alternative to the Secretary's system, one which could secure national respectability without the unacceptable

risks to revolutionary accomplishments that Hamilton's seemed to entail. In the years after 1800, they had gradually dismantled much of the foundation on which the Federalists had meant to build an America that could compete with empires such as England's on English terms. They had substituted a different vision, in which a society of independent men of virtue would appear in arms when necessary to defend America's shores, but trust their influence on the course of history, more generally, to the moral force of republican example and the necessary demand for the raw materials they would produce for trade. Jefferson and Madison had also tried a different course in foreign policy. Under the pressure of Napoleonic wars, the Republican alternative had failed.

Hamilton had been right, at least in significant part. America did not have the capacity to force the great states of Europe to accept the kind of international order within which the new nation could pursue the Republican ideal, a society in which the virtue of independent farmers and craftsmen would not be threatened by great cities, large-scale industry, professional armed forces, and a polity committed to the mysteries and dangers of English-style finance. The choice did seem to lie between greater self-sufficiency and national humiliation or war. Now, implicitly, a Republican President admitted this truth.

It was not an unconditional surrender to Hamilton's ideas. Madison could hope that vast expanses of western land and the continued leadership of genuine republicans would postpone to an indefinite future the debilitating corruption that Republicans had always feared. He still had no desire to see the land become a democratic England. Yet he did suggest that old Jeffersonian principles might be tempered with a program that would resurrect an essential portion of the Hamiltonian state. In doing so, he legitimized the other side of a debate that had held the nation's attention since 1789. He hinted that America could build on an amalgam of Republican and Federalist ideas, and the majority of his party agreed. . . .

The ancient argument did not abruptly stop. . . . As the "American System" of Henry Clay, the Hamiltonian vision of a self-sufficient republic, where industrial development would provide a domestic market for agricultural goods and federal programs would tie diverse sections into an imperial whole, remained a central topic for political division and dispute. Jacksonians attacked "aristocracy" and "corruption." Whigs condemned "King Andrew." John C. Calhoun was intensely concerned with something strongly reminiscent of corrupting influence. The new Republicans who followed Lincoln celebrated virtue and the independent man. As a consequence of revolutionary hopes and thought, proponents of American grandeur have always had to answer those who worry about a loss of innocence at home. In the years around 1815, however, the context of these controversies underwent a fundamental change. Experiments with economic coercion, followed by the War of 1812, had exposed an undeniable weakness in the principles on which the Republican party had based its rule. But the war had also made it easier to contemplate a change of course. Events destroyed one of the two great parties to the long dispute

over the shaping of a society and government that could make republicanism lasting and complete. Doing this, they freed the other party to turn its attention to the needs of the future. Leadership passed increasingly to younger men, whose lives had not been molded by the great Revolution that had shaped the experience of the generation before. Arguments among the younger men would still be fierce, but the edges of hysteria grew blunt. For it was now the most appropriate means of national development that seemed to be at stake, not the very meaning of America itself.

